

PRIMITIVE MAN

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PUBLISHED BY THE
CATHOLIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONFERENCE
WASHINGTON, D. C.



PRIMITIVE MAN

Quarterly Bulletin
of the
Catholic Anthropological Conference

Vol IX

October, 1936

No. 4

SOME ASPECTS OF JAMES BAY RECREATIVE CULTURE

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THE data incorporated in the present paper were gathered during the summers of 1933 and 1935 at Moose Factory, Ontario, at the southern tip of James Bay. My informants were from both the west and the east coasts of the Bay as well as from the region around Moose. Much of the recreative culture of these Cree of the west coast and Montagnais of the east coast has remained intact, although there are some things for which I had to rely on the memory of the oldest Indians available.

The Eastern Cree recreative culture conforms to the basic pattern of general Eastern Cree culture on the one hand and to that of general American recreative culture on the other. It is marked by extreme poverty and simplicity and by the absence of play features widely spread and deeply embedded in the recreative culture of the peoples farther south and west. Team games, strenuous competition, magico-religious elements in play, and gambling, are absent. Absent, too, are organized play groups like our own white boys' gangs and girls' sets with their common double code and predatory and snubbing activities and attitudes.

Parents encourage their children in imitative play at an early age by making for them, in miniature, articles used in everyday

life. Practically every child from the age of three or so upward has a canoe paddle of a size suitable to his height. When on a trip the children are free to paddle or not, as they like. Usually they want to help, and it is not an uncommon sight to see a whole family,—father and mother together with three or four children,—paddling in unison. An upturned soapbox on dry land makes an admirable and safe canoe in which a two-and-a-half year old child with his diminutive paddle can amuse himself for hours. Little girls are given dolls and cradles. Up to the age of eleven or twelve girls play “mothers” and “house” very much as our own youngsters do, the house in this case being a small tipi made of short poles with perhaps an old blanket as covering, or, as often as not, no covering at all. A little fire outside the tipi and a bit of dough or meat begged from mother who is preparing the family meal seem to delight the small girl.

Several children may play together, or a child may play by itself for a long time and not miss the company of others. Little boys up to the age of four or five usually are looked after and played with by their older sisters, but it is seldom a boy older than six is seen in the company of girls. At about this age boys are given small bows and arrows, and their greatest ambition is to be able to shoot well enough to kill a bird. Much ado is made over the killing of the first bird. The boy brings it to his grandfather or father who are immensely proud of him. Small though it is, it is duly prepared and then divided among the members of the family,—the boy being given none of it, in order to teach him the tribal code of sharing with others.

Besides those playthings which are copied after adult patterns, there are a few others, among which are slings, buzzers, bull-roarers, and wooden tops twirled with the fingers. There are a number of games primarily for children, which have a more or less set form. One of these is a goose-hunting game played by boys between eight and ten or younger. The boys build a small stand or sit in a circle while one or two of them will represent waveys by placing quills upright between the fingers of both hands and will approach the “stand” making flying motions with their hands and uttering goose calls. The “guns” are flippers and the “bullets” chips of wood. The hunter aims at a

"wavey" and if he succeeds in hitting a quill, the boy carrying the quills opens his fingers and the struck quill drops to the ground to be claimed by the proud hunter. This game is played more in the seasons when the waveys are actually migrating, although a group of boys played it for me one summer evening. I was told by one informant that if boys spontaneously play this game often during the goose-hunting season, the men will have good luck in shooting geese.

A game played by girls of all ages together is one that my interpreter called the "fire game" because, when the game opens, the girl having the principal part in the game is sitting by an imaginary fire pretending to cook something. This part is played by one of the older and larger girls. Another of about the same age and build is selected as "mother" of all the other children who line up behind her, each grasping the next around her waist, the smallest child at the end of the line. There is a set dialogue between the two "leaders" and then the one at the fire tries to "kill" the children by touching each one with a stick. The "mother" tries to protect the children, who must keep in line, dropping out only when touched. It is a very lively and exciting game, ending up with a tussle between the "leaders" when all of the children have been "killed". The one who succeeds in throwing the other to the ground is the winner or rather is entitled, when the game is next played, to take the part of the one who sits beside the fire.

There is another children's game played by girls or by boys, —separately, never together. It is called "*mahihkan*" or wolf, and is a sort of tag game with two bases of safety. Sticks are drawn to determine who shall be "it" or wolf. The rest are deer, and wolf tags any of the deer he can lay hands on when the deer are off base. Those tagged become wolves and help get the deer. Taunting remarks are bandied back and forth and sometimes the "tags" are rather heavy blows and pulls of the hair, but all is taken good-naturedly and in fun. There is another more complicated, but similar, game called "*otcipo*", translated to me as "robber" but probably originally meaning Ojibwa.

Hide-and-seek seems to be a very old game among the Cree; and incidentally, a hide-and-seek game was mentioned for the

region further south by LeJeune in the Jesuit Relations of 1634. It is different too, from our hide and seek, in that "it" hides and the rest seek. This is played by big boys or girls even fifteen and sixteen years old.

Although the games mentioned so far are really children's games, the adults occasionally indulge in them too. Not only did I get several accounts from different women of particular occasions recently when they had played the girls' "fire game" but a group of women,—all of them grandmothers,—actually played that and "*mahihkan*" for me one afternoon. And it may be added that they played these games with more verve than the children whom I had observed. Doctor Cooper tells me that he had found some of the middle-aged men greatly enjoying hopscotch, a game that had just been introduced among the children by the school teacher. Incidentally, one moonlight night they played it from nine o'clock until four the next morning.

There are some games, however, that are played only by adults. The cup-and-pin game is still a favorite and seems to be a man's game although there was no objection to the women trying to play it with the specimens I obtained. The women were not very skillful at it and I got no record of women having actually played it.

What is presumably a very simple form of snowsnake is still played by men and by boys from the age of about sixteen upward. The implements are straight slender pieces of wood about five feet long, pointed at each end and usually blackened. The men and boys play snowsnake only when the snow is soft and feathery, and the idea is to see who can make his stick go farthest.

The platter game is no longer played and there were only two informants who could give me any information on it. Both of these informants were women from the region around Moose. One told me it was a man's game and that it was played with a wooden plate and stone dice, but she had only seen it played from a distance. The other told me she had played it herself and that both men and women played. They used a wooden plate and bone dice, round, blackened on one side, and about the size of a man's coat button. I could get no details on the count from

her but the name for this game given by her, *pākēsānek*, agrees very well with the name for the platter game among the Western Cree.

Another game which this same woman described, but which was apparently unknown to any of my other informants, was played by two men at a time, each having a sort of bat, flat oval in shape with a handle just long enough to grasp. The men bat a deerskin ball stuffed with hair, back and forth, without letting it touch the ground. This reminds one of the aboriginal type of battledore and shuttlecock described by Culin for the extreme western part of the continent, but which has not been recorded, so far as I know, for any other locality.

The woman's double-ball game was described to me as having been played among the Cree on the west coast of the Bay, but I could get no record of it from informants for other sections. The implements used were of the crudest kind. The stick was about five feet long and sometimes but not always forked. The balls were strips of bark two inches wide and folded flat into a bundle about five inches long, and joined by a string of inner bark. One old woman made me a pair for my ethnological collection. Both she and her daughter had played the game, but I could get no set rules, if there were any, and the idea they had of the game was a sort of free-for-all tossing of the balls and catching them on the end of the stick.

Boys and men play at high jumping. Foot and canoe races were said to have been popular in olden times. The tug-of-war was popular with men and women, not in mixed groups, but separately. Another contest of strength was practised by two men seated on the ground, each grasping the end of a pole and trying to see which could pull the other over. My interpreter told me she sometimes played at this with her young son, but had never tried it with anyone else.

There are a number of minor amusements which may be indulged in by the whole family together. One is to take a muskrat skull and place a stick in the nostril, ask a question such as "Who is the biggest liar?", and throw the skull down. He to whom the stick points is the "biggest liar" or "so-and-so's sweetheart", etc., according to the question asked. There are other

amusements, and I was told by one old woman that she and her sisters when children often made up games which they played.

There are certain features of the recreative culture of the James Bay Cree which are significant in showing the conformity of this phase of culture to the general Eastern Cree pattern and which present a contrast to the patterns of their more advanced neighbors.

Of the more organized sports that are so widespread in North America and which are found well developed among their western and more southern neighbors, we find among the Cree only a few, and these in simple form. We have snowsnake, platter, and the woman's double-ball game. There is no trace, so far as we could find, of moccasin, hoop and pole, racquet or lacrosse games. The few sports we have recorded for the Cree are or were played with very crude implements, entirely lacking symbolic ornamentation. The rules for playing are few and the idea of team games seems absent. Whether these sports in simple form represent chronologically earlier forms of what later became well defined games, or whether they are later attenuated forms, they fit into the general simple pattern of Eastern Cree culture.

The buzzer and bull-roarer, used to-day to a certain extent as toys, are and were used magically or religiously to bring the North Wind. The "wavey" game, as mentioned above, and the cup-and-pin game, Dr. Cooper informs me, may occasionally be used for magical or religious purposes in connection with hunting. But religion and magic are not appealed to, to bring success in games. In this sense at least there is no association in any of the games or amusements we have described with religion or magic. There are or were magico-religious songs and dances, some of which incidentally provided recreational outlets. But there is no song or ritual accompanying any of the games, except one little song of about four lines, known to everyone, which is sung when the buzzer is twirled. The disassociation of recreation from religion and magic is in line with the general divorce of practically every phase of life but hunting and sickness from religion and magic. Even the crises of life,—birth, adolescence

marriage and death,—are entirely or almost entirely unmarked by religious or magical observances.

Although there seem to be what are considered distinctly as men's games and women's games, the line is not drawn so sharply as elsewhere and there is no taboo of any sort on women witnessing men's games and knowing about them.

The non-competitive element that is characteristic of other phases of Cree culture is to a large extent characteristic also of Cree recreative culture. Of course in contests there is some degree of the competitive element present, but it is more masked and implicit. There is no challenge and no drive to triumph over contestants. Defeat is taken not only goodnaturedly but lightly. Prestige is not gotten through play success. Ability to do things, not to beat others, is what counts. Moreover the fighting spirit in play is not present. The boys using bows and arrows and other weapons play at hunting, not at warfare—again in line with Cree tradition. Some of the games of the children are rough and tumble, but deliberate cruelty is not approved.

The children form into loose play groups, but the gang in its characteristic form as found among us white Americans can hardly be said to exist. Instead of horizontal age groupings between ten and sixteen, the Cree play group constitutes a vertical grouping from even five or six to fifteen. A Cree play group has nothing like a specific name, initiation rites, or entrance tests. There are no predatory activities or "snubbing" attitudes. On the one hand there is no marked exclusiveness and on the other there is no intensive intra-group loyalty. The leadership may be a real one, but it goes more commonly to the oldest in a play group than to the most popular or the most able. All in all we have the play group with leadership, but not the gang. Chums, however, it might be added, are fairly common.

Although the cup-and-pin game is one that would readily lend itself to gambling, actually it is not used for that purpose. Even a typical gambling game like platter is among the Eastern Cree a non-gambling one. The Cree and Montagnais of James Bay, like most other peoples on the same simple level of culture, had

no gambling at all. In this respect, as in the general simplicity of its recreative culture, in the absence of team games and in the disassociation of magic and religion from games, these northern Indians call to mind their equally simple and lowly nomad counterparts, the Fuegians, at the other extreme of the American continent. Whether such parallels are merely chance ones, or whether they have carried over from earlier times, as Nordenskiöld held was the case as regards so many elements of material culture, it would be hazardous to decide. But if a comparative study of non-material traits such as Nordenskiöld carried through as regards material culture should be undertaken, the negative parallels would at least deserve consideration. They are found not only in recreative culture but in most other phases of non-material culture and perhaps may link up the simplest level on the American continent with some of the simplest cultural levels in other parts of the world. But that is a longer story, a problem of world culture, rather than an aspect of James Bay recreative culture.

THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE YORUBA

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THE information presented in this paper was gathered by the writer during his four years of residence among the Yoruba from October, 1930, to November, 1934. The Yoruba tribe dwell in the southern part of Nigeria on the west coast of Africa. They are of negroid stock. They number about two million. They live mainly by horticulture. Palm-oil, maize, yams, and the flesh of wild animals are their chief foods.

Before beginning to treat of the parent-child relationship I wish to say that though the majority of Yoruba marriages are of the monogamous type, there is to be found in every part of the Yoruba country the polygynous union, that is, marriage between one man and a number of wives. The number of wives may be, for example, two, five, ten, fifty, one hundred, two hun-

dred. A couple of score of Yoruba men have two hundred wives each, some few have more. It is well to bear these two types of marriage in mind for they have important influences on the parent-child relationship. The wives are all acquired by purchase, the husband paying £12-10 for each of them.

When a baby is born in the family there is great joy in the household. Whether it is a boy or a girl does not seem to matter much, but in some cases the girl is more highly prized,—but not for a very altruistic reason,—because on her marriage the parents will receive the bride-price.

A party is given in the child's honor eight days after birth. All the neighbors are invited. All kinds of native foods are passed around and there is plenty of palm-wine which is the native beverage. It is customary for everyone to get drunk. The father moves about smiling and full of delight as he receives the congratulations of his guests and the mother is almost too happy for words.

There is no cradle or cot of any kind installed in the home. Instead the mother gets a long, wide strip of native cloth and secures the baby on her back. That serves as a cot. From morning until evening the mother goes about her daily rounds both in the home and outside with her baby secured in this fashion. Occasionally she takes a walk through the village in the evening, carrying the baby in the same position just to let everyone see it. She is not content until everyone has noticed it and has praised it in her presence. Those who do not do so are the worst in the world.

I remember once I got into hot water by not doing so. At the time I had been only a short while in the country and I did not know much about the native customs then. I went to salute a Catholic family one evening, and spent some time talking to the family, but left without telling the mother what a lovely baby she was after having. I did not think it was very important to tell her.

But afterwards when I met the mother, she wouldn't look at me. She deliberately looked the other way. She showed her anger too by giving up coming to church. After that I was more careful. When I met a woman with a new-born babe, I gave her all the praise she craved.

The child is very carefully nourished and cared for. It is fed by the mother for a period of three years after birth. During these three years the magico-religious taboo against marital relations must be carefully observed by the mother.

The mother looks after the child with the tenderest care. She is overjoyed when it smiles and kicks with delight; when it cries she does everything in her power to bring it back to a normal state again. It is coached to walk and talk by its mother just as we were coached by ours.

As it grows older the mother chants for it little songs and rhymes and tells it simple little stories that have a practical background and usually a moral. One of them was about a little girl who did not do what its mother told it to do. She told it to go to the market and buy some cassava, but it spent the money and remained away playing with the other children. As it was coming home by night-fall, it met a white man (*oyinbo*). He caught hold of it and carried it away.

Unfortunately mothers, even some of those who are friendly with us and whom we know well, have a habit of silencing the child by telling it that if it is not good the white man will come and take it away. This very often makes the child fear us. One child in the street where I lived used to get fits of terror every time I passed along. At the very first sight of me it used to run screaming into the house. Only after I had met it unaware one day and had given it a few pats on the little woolly head and some candy, did it come to regard me as a normal human being. It is a pity mothers sometimes do this, for it very often puts a barrier between the child and us which is not easily broken down.

At about five the child begins its vocational education. It assists the mother at her household work or on the farm. When at evening time she comes homeward bound carrying a load on her head, the little child runs along before her down the bush trail carrying on its head a tiny bundle of sticks or yams or perhaps a calabash of water or of palm-wine. As it grows older the mother makes its load bigger; it is given more work; it assists in the planting of yams or maize or helps to keep the space between the lines of cocoa trees clear of long grass.

The child does not go to school for the simple reason that, in the bush there are no schools; there is no school system such as ours. The Mohammedans, it is true, have a type of bush-school; that is, a certain cool spot under a palm tree is selected and the Mohammedan children are taught to memorize the Koran. But as the percentage of Mohammedans among the Yoruba is small, and as the great mass of the Yoruba people belong to no Christian sect of any kind, we need not deal with this type of school.

Education centers mainly in the home. The child is not taught to read or write. Neither of the parents can do so. Besides the parents regard reading and writing as part of the white man's culture and of no importance anyhow. But it does learn the customs of the tribe, the laws of the country, the folklore and the Yoruba songs. For the most part the child just picks these up from its parents.

Very often the mother teaches the child how to dance, and she is delighted when it gives a creditable performance of this art in public. I mention the dance for it is a very important part of the social life of the young Yoruba. There are many different kinds of dances: some of them represent the movements of a bird through the air; some of them represent two persons following one another around as if in a very fiery conflict; others demonstrate sorrow or joy or love and so forth. Those taking part in the dance go through all kinds of gyrations and contortions before the tam-tams and seem to be wholly carried away with the spirit of the performance. All of them learn to dance but some of the boys and girls are more expert in body movements and in foot work than others.

As regards the rest of the training it is for the most part picked up from the mother at work. It is given according to the customs and traditions of the land.

One day as I was coming down a bush-path, I heard a conversation going on nearby. I looked through the thick undergrowth and I saw a native mother and her child of about six bending down over a patch of yams and pulling weeds. They did not see me. I heard the mother say to the child in the

native tongue: "*Kil o fé ní nìgbati o dàgba?*"¹ (what will you have when you grow up?). The little boy replied: "*Nìgbati mo dàgba emi o ní oko nla ati coka pupò ati owó pupó ati emi o še enia pataki ní ilu wa nitoripé emi ó ní yawo pupó gegebi baba mi*" (when I grow up I will have a big farm, I will have plenty of cocoa trees, I will have plenty of money and I will have an important place in the village for I intend to have many wives like my father). And the mother said to him: "*Eyi o sun dáádá*" (that will be fine.) Now to us the idea of a child of six having notions of accumulating wives may sound somewhat shocking. We say to ourselves: "When a child has such sentiments at that age what is he going to turn out to be?" And again we think in our mind: "What can you expect from a child anyhow when its mother approves of such ideas."

Well, we may think these things. But let us look at the matter more closely. The first thing a person must remember on hearing anything like this in Africa is that he is in Africa and not in Europe or America; that he is in a country with many customs, laws, taboos, traditions different from those of his homeland. And the second thing to remember is that status among the Yoruba is mainly gotten by the accumulation of wives. Drive for status, and not usually the motive of sex, impels a rich man to pay the dowry for as many wives as the size of his purse allows.

This little boy wanted to become important among his fellows when he grew up. We cannot blame him for that. Many of us had similar aspirations too. The idea of sex never entered into the child's mind. The child saw that the one way to become important was to have many wives like his father and that is why he told his mother so.

Why then did she approve of it? Why did she herself, a woman, praise him for his polygynous desire? Simply because she wanted to see the child whom she loved dearly, who was all the world to her, get on well in the world.

Mothers give children some moral instruction. I have often heard the Yoruba woman lecture her child: "*Enikéni ní lati fun*

¹ Phonetic symbols used as follows: e, as a in English "fate"; ẹ, as in "step"; o, as aw in "awl"; ẹ, as sh in "shore"; j, as dg in "edge"; g, always hard; ̀ denotes low tone; ́, high tone.

teriba fun baba ati iya ati ogá" (a person must obey the father and mother and the master); and again: "*Iwo ko gbodo ji late enikení ni ile re*" (you must not steal from anyone in your house). I have never heard of any prohibition against stealing from any other place or person. Also: "*Iwo ko gbodo bú enia*" (you must not insult anyone) is always insisted upon by the mother.

To the child she often quotes proverbs, in which the Yoruba language is so rich, and little stories which have an apt moral.

Neither is the religious life neglected. It is partly picked up from the mother. The child is with her and watches carefully when she periodically makes her fetish sacrifices; when, too, in her trouble she supplicates the household god, less by words than by sacrifice, usually by sprinkling the blood of a fowl on the ju-ju. Her deep religious fervor and her reverence towards the fetish must necessarily leave a deep impression on the mind of her little watchful child.

You may wonder why I have not mentioned the father all this time. You may be inclined to ask if he takes any part in the education of the child or if he has any relations with it.

I must say that from what I have seen, the father takes little part in these matters. Though he loves the child dearly, he rarely interferes; he leaves the training almost entirely with the mother.

There seems to be a lesser bond between the polygynous father and his child than between the monogamous father and his. In the polygynous household the child seems to regard the father as more a master than a true father. He calls him *ogá*, which in Yoruba means master, whereas in the monogamous household, the father is addressed as *baba*, which means true father. In the polygynous family the child lives and sleeps in its mother's room in the harem and is not usually allowed into the father's side of the house at all. It may not come in contact with its father more than once a month. In cases where the father has as many as fifty or one hundred wives the bond between the child and the father does not seem to be very close.

However, even the polygynous father is very proud of his child. And when that child arrives at the age of about fifteen, he helps

it as far as he can to get a start in life. If it is a male child, the father obtains for him a patch of land which henceforth belongs to the boy. Or if the boy wishes to take on a trade, such as that of bricklayer or blacksmith, or a profession, such as that of witch doctor or medicine man, the father finds a suitable man with whom the boy may serve the term of apprenticeship which is usually for three years. After the boy has put in the time, the father pays the £3 fee to the boy's master and the boy is then a full-fledged man of the trade. His father gives him some money to begin work and he also gives him a warning that in future he must stand on his own feet, that no more money will be expended on him.

There are no trades or professions open to the girls. They work on the farm or do petty-trading up to the time they get married, which is from seventeen to twenty years of age.

I have never seen a father treat his child harshly. Neither have I seen a mother use harsh methods towards a child. I have, however, watched mothers punish their children but as far as I could see only when punishment was deserved. I have known a boy to be locked in his room for a whole day because he stole a fish from his mother. And I have watched a Yoruba woman administer a sound threshing to her boy who had beaten his small brother. There seems to be always a due proportion between the punishment and the delinquency in cases where punishment is meted out. And many times I have seen children escape when they seemed to have deserved castigation.

If there are many children in the polygynous household they constitute a sufficiently large social group, and the child moves among them. If there are few children they are encouraged by their mother to mix with the children of the same street and play all kinds of games. I used to notice that the mothers sat around and encouraged their children as they played the following game: a number of children form a circle around a child, which, at a given signal moves from its place in the center and dashes at someone in the ring. The person dashed at runs around once on the outside of the circle and if it succeeds in getting back to its place before the other child touches it, it is free; if it does not, it must exchange places with the child who

touches it. Very often the person in the center dashes at some small child or one that it thinks cannot run too well. For it is anxious to get out of the center at any cost. They have many games such as this. The mother often watches as her child fights or wrestles, and very often takes an active part in its activities coaching it on to victory.

Up to the age of six the children of both sexes are allowed by the parents to mix freely and to play their little games. But from six onward there is a tendency for a girl to go with the group of girls and for the boy to go with his. After puberty there is a definite taboo, which is rigorously enforced by the parents, against the mingling of the sexes in public or private.

However, though this sex association is taboo, a great deal of it goes on nevertheless. As soon as a boy has acquired a patch of land and a house, he makes it a point to get in touch with someone he likes. It is not uncommon, under such circumstances, for true love to crop up. It is not the boy who goes to the girl's house, because she lives in the same room with her mother and if he goes there simply to meet her and not to arrange with her parents about taking her in marriage,—well, he would probably never go again. It is the girl who secretly goes round to his house, and if she finds that she might be missed by her mother she comes home early; if not, she returns home sometimes in the morning. When a boy wishes to marry a certain girl he goes to the parents of the girl and tells them of his intentions. The parents are very reluctant about coming to a decision and only after about three months can he get anything definite from them. In the meantime, they seek for physical and moral qualities in him and status in his family. And for them most important of all, they inquire after his ability to pay the "bride price". If he cannot pay that he is turned down no matter how fine a fellow he is. Sometimes a girl of strong character refuses the suitor and, against her parents' wishes, elopes with a boy of her own choice.

This, then, is a very brief and a very general picture of some phases of the parent-child relationship among the Yoruba. It will at least serve to give an idea of the drift of the thing. Essentially the relationship is about the same as with us. The differences are minor matters.

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